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SUBJECT: ARAB LEAGUE BOYCOTT MEETING: SPIELBERG DESIGNATED

REF: 06 DAMASCUS 05302

Classified By: A/DCM William Roebuck for reasons 1.4 b/d

¶1. (U) Summary. The semi-annual meeting of the Arab League Boycott group was held April 23-26 in Damascus. Participation and results followed expectations and closely paralleled last November's gathering (reftel). No companies were dropped; the one announced addition to the blacklist of entities is film director Steven Spielberg and his Righteous Persons Foundation. End Summary.

¶2. (C) The semi-annual meeting of the Damascus-based Arab League Boycott Office (ALBO) was held April 23-26. In attendance were diplomats and/or representatives from Algeria, Iraq, Lebanon, Kuwait, Libya, Morocco, the Palestinian Authority, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Sudan, Syria, Tunisia, the United Arab Emirates and Yemen, according to Muhammed al Ajami, head of the Syrian Regional Office for the Boycott of Israel. The Arab League main body and the Organization of Islamic Conference also had members present, he said. Malaysia, Iran, Pakistan and Indonesia showed support (via the OIC) for the boycott, and they and other countries will likely implement their own bans following the ALBO format, Ajami speculated. As with prior meetings, the most notable absences were those Arab states who have signed separate accords with Israel: Jordan, Egypt and Mauritania, Ajami said. Djibouti and Somalia did not attend, despite earlier efforts by ALBO seeking to encourage their presence, said Ajami.

¶3. (C) No companies were removed from the list during this most recent meeting. The one addition mentioned was film director Steven Spielberg, who was singled out for his USD one million donation to Israel last year during the summer conflict in Lebanon, according to Ajami. The committee banned all films and other products related to Spielberg or his Righteous Persons Foundation, Ajami said. Generic enforcement guidelines given to ALBO members include the banning of DVD imports and airing of Spielberg's films. Financial services behemoth Merrill Lynch, while not added to the blacklist, landed on ALBO's watchlist, according to Ajami. Cosmetics giant Estee Lauder was added to the blacklist at the November 2006 meeting after being on the watchlist for several months, he added, to underline the potential significance of being put on the watchlist.

¶4. (C) Comment. Ajami was much more forthcoming with EconOff than he was in a November 2006 meeting, expressing confidence that the boycott was growing stronger and asserting that Israel's position in the region was becoming weaker. Echoing what seemed like a SARG-supplied talking point, Ajami also claimed that Syria is now being recognized as a key player in regional problems and beyond.
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